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The 40th Anniversary of the Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Revisits His Opposition to War

STATEMENT BY SENATOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS, CHAIRMAN OF THE CALIFORNIA LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS

“As the nation prepares to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., with tributes to his Civil Rights legacy and commitment to non-violence, citizens should remember Dr. King’s opposition to war.

“On April 4, 1967, exactly one year to the day before his assassination in 1968, Dr. King, this nation’s greatest contemporary disciple of non-violence, told an audience at Riverside Church that his ‘conscience (left him) no other choice’ than to condemn the war in Vietnam. He declared that ending the war through non-violent means was a ‘moral imperative.’

“Despite strong opposition from the Civil Rights and political establishments to his anti-war stance, Dr. King said the war was changing the nation’s domestic priorities and siphoning off resources needed to address economic and educational inequities, and health disparities.

“Once again the U.S. is involved in an unpopular and costly war based on questionable motives, ambiguous objectives and evil practices; a war, which seems to have no crest to its rising iniquity.

“Total funding for the Iraq War hovers near half-a-trillion dollars, while domestic spending for health, education, the infrastructure, foster care, the elderly and the disabled sustain continuous cuts. California, often thought to be the wealthiest in the nation, has not been spared as we learn of the Governor’s draconian budget cuts.

“Nowhere is the ‘mutilated conscience,’ that Dr. King spoke of, more evident than in the alarming issue of physicians involved in torture in the Iraq War. Reports from the *International Red Cross* and *The New England Journal of Medicine* provide overwhelming evidence that military physicians and psychologists have directly participated in the development and cover-up of torture and abuse of detainees in U.S. custody.

“Dr. King would not remain silent on an issue of such moral importance, and nor will I. Dr. King repeatedly warned us that, ‘He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it.’

“Torture is much more than a political issue. It is an ethical, moral and spiritual issue that has not only become a shame, but it is an evil in our midst. In this period of international crisis, we must be ever reminded of what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., stated so emphatically, ‘Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.’

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